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FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

London Food Commission Launched at London Conference

A new London Food Commission is to be launched this weekend at the Mayor's London Conference. Deputy Mayor and Green Assembly Member, Jenny Jones will be joined at the launch by Mayor Ken Livingstone and Honor Chapman, Chair of the London Development Agency, which is funding the Commission.

The Mayor will announce he is appointing Jenny Jones as Chair of the Commission. The launch will take place at 12.30pm, Saturday 29th November in the Elizabeth Windsor Room, QEII centre.

The Commission is being established to investigate food issues in the capital. London has lacked a strategic overview since the former London Food Commission was replaced by the national Food Commission.

Jenny Jones, Deputy Mayor and Chair of London Food Commission said:

"London's food industry is immense, serving over 7 million people a day. London has the most diverse multicultural population in the world, which enriches our food culture. The choices we make as consumers of food have huge environmental, social and economic implications. We need a sustainable food policy for London that is good for the environment, good for business and ensures access to fresh healthy food for all Londoners"

Honor Chapman, Chair, London Development Agency added: "I am delighted that we are launching this Commission as the London food industry is one of the largest sectors within the capital's economy, accounting for around 12% of London jobs. The LDA is currently undertaking research to look at all aspects of food production, food manufacturing in London and a range of connected issues."

"There are also over 12,000 hectares or nearly 30,000 acres of farmland in Greater London, representing nearly 8% of the capital's land. There are also over 400 farmers in London who are struggling to cope with problems such as low market prices, poor infrastructure and weak links to the consumer. These are small and medium sized companies whose interests need to be considered in any discussions about the future of London's economy."

Mayor Ken Livingstone said, "I am delighted to be resurrecting the London Food Commission - a body I was proud to first establish when leader of GLC in the 1980s. Awareness of the problems caused by food poverty, poor diet and lack of access to good local retail food outlets is growing. The new Food Commission will provide a strategic focus across London to address these and other issues."

ENDS

For further information please call Rachelle Laurence on 020 7 983 4068 / 07771 814 478 or Ben McKnight on 020 7 983 4071 / 07881 501 920 (numbers not for publication)

Notes to editors

The London Conference is on Saturday 29 November 2003 9am - 5pm
QE II Conference Centre, Broad Sanctuary, London SW1P 3EE
Admission: FREE, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC - to register call 020-7983 4158

Email: londonconference@london.gov.uk; or online at www.london.gov.uk

(1) The London Conference is an opportunity for people to put their views to the Mayor and take part in informed discussion about important issues in the capital with key policymakers, including politicians and public sector managers. Last year's conference attracted over 1,600 Londoners.

(2) The conference is free and the public is welcome to attend. Delegates need to register in advance - call 020 7983 4100. For additional information visit the Greater London Authority website: www.london.gov.uk/mayor/london_conference/index.jsp

(3) London Food Commission was set up in 1984 by the GLC, and continued after GLC abolition in 1986 for another 5 years. In 1990 the Food Commission took over.

(4) Jenny Jones, Deputy Mayor and Green Assembly Member will chair the 'Eat London - a vision for a sustainable food city' seminar at the London Conference, starting at 12.30pm. The speakers at this session will be: Dan Keech, London Food Link - represents 66 food organizations. The organisation helps producers, consumers and retailers make a positive choice for sustainable, local food. Geetie Singh, Singboulton Limited. Chain of three organic gastro pubs in London. Claire Pritchard, Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency. Food access co-operative at a number of housing estates Ken Ife - Board of the African Caribbean Business Network

(5) Two major issues of interest to Jenny Jones are:

1. The unsustainability of London's food system.

Over 80% of London's food is imported and it makes a large contribution to carbon dioxide emissions and climate change. It is high time we looked at ways to reduce the distance food travels and ways of sourcing more local, seasonal, organic food that will encourage thriving local economies and support a diverse food culture.

2. Food poverty and access to affordable, nutritious fresh food

The trend towards larger supermarkets and out of town shopping has led to the closure of many smaller shops. This has hit people without car access and families in lower income brackets hardest. It is estimated that thousands of people in London are likely to experience difficulties in accessing affordable, fresh food. The level of poverty in London, particularly the 43% of London's children living in poverty, has major implications for their diet and nutrition and long term health. Providing affordable, fresh, nutritious food, would improve the health of the poorest of Londoners and make substantial saving in the NHS budget.

(6) The London Development Agency (LDA) will work jointly with regional and local agencies and voluntary sector groups in taking forward the recommendations from the Government's delivery plan for Sustainable Farming and Food in the South East Region and London and developing a London Sustainable Food Strategy. The London Food Commission will work closely with the LDA in taking this Food Strategy forward.

(7) The term 'food deserts' are areas where there is no local provision of food, beyond junk food. Thirteen wards across three East London boroughs have been identified as 'food deserts'. In addition the shift towards processed food and away from fresh produce, combined with a decline in cooking skills and nutritional advice have contributed to increased ill health, including coronary heart disease.

(8) The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that by eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day deaths from these diseases could be reduced by up to 20%.

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